

Race to the Top Update Fall 2012 Charter Schools Project

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Charter schools are an integral part of Maryland's public education landscape. The State's charter schools have often served at the forefront of innovation and have represented much-needed choices for families who previously had few or no options for their children. As the charter movement grows in Maryland, the State will focus its efforts on ensuring not only the quantity of its charter schools but also their quality.

The Race to the Top (RTTT) funds enable the State to provide **additional opportunities to ensure that charter schools** are true **partners in Maryland's education reform strategy**. This is particularly relevant when it comes to the State's persistently lowest-achieving schools. Charter schools have a role in the **turnaround strategy** both as one of the options allowed in the school improvement Federal guidelines and as a way to enable local education agencies (LEAs) to develop portfolios of schools with innovative approaches.

Maryland utilizes Race to the Top (RTTT) funds to help advance the crucial goals of **1) making sure that only high-quality charter schools exist and thrive** across the state, **2) creating incentives** for charter schools to be **used as a school turnaround strategy**, and **3) improving** the transparency and consistency of the **charter school authorizing process**.

GOAL 1: The Maryland State Department of Education Office of School Innovation (OSI) along with the Title I Office and the Breakthrough Center, will develop a partnership with two school systems with the highest number of low-performing schools to convert schools in restructuring to charter schools.

- The Furman L. Templeton Preparatory Academy in Baltimore, the first restart charter school identified in the Race to the Top Charter School project, has begun its second school year as a charter school. The school's partnership with Midtown Academy will continue this year.
- The schools' instructional staffs collaborated in joint professional development sessions throughout the year and focused on

strengthening Board development and successfully implementing governance board roles, responsibilities, and protocols. Furman Templeton Preparatory Academy's Board gleaned from Midtown Academy best practices for operating a charter school.

- During SY 2012 -2013 the focus of Furman Templeton Preparatory Academy and Midtown Academy will be to improve the teaching skills and knowledge of teachers by participating in joint classroom observations and collaboratively engaging PD that focuses on increasing teaching capacity.

GOAL 2: The Office of School Innovation will advance the work of designing Maryland's Charter School Quality Standards to develop a framework for charter schools to conduct self-assessment every three years for improvement and development efforts.

- The Quality Standards For Charter Schools pilot project was completed in June 2012. The following seven (7) schools were participants-
 - Roots and Branches School
 - Furman L. Templeton Preparatory Academy
 - Baltimore Montessori Middle School
 - Monarch Academy (Baltimore Campus)
 - Chesapeake Math and IT Academy
 - Imagine Foundation II Public Charter School
 - Imagine Andrews Public Charter School

Feedback from school teams indicated that the process of utilizing the Quality Standards as a framework for school performance was invaluable. Some school teams shared that completing the process of alignment with the Quality Standards helped them to recognize the areas where they are being effective and doing well and prompted them to think about how they can continue to implement best practices. For a few participants, it made them think about the ways in which they need to document the effective practices they already have in place. Other participants said it helped them to think about the next school year and to plan for the things they will address. One

school representative thought that the standards were a “road map” that can provide guidance for the things they should focus on a short-mid- and long-term basis.

- The Quality Standards Self-Assessment Pilot Project is underway. OSI and teams from Baltimore Montessori Public Charter School, The Empowerment Academy, Roots and Branches School, and Chesapeake Public Charter School met to convene the Self-Assessment Pilot Orientation and Training. The purpose of this initiative is for charter schools to monitor outcomes from the implementation of the Quality Standards performance measures and practices, providing an empirical base to inform ongoing work to strengthen the charter school practices.
- The Charter School Quality Standard (Quality Standard C- Student Learning and Achievement) Curriculum Pilot is currently in process. Furman L. Templeton Preparatory Academy, Imagine Foundations II, and Monarch Academy are participants in this initiative. School teams will develop and implement action plans to use the Common Core State Curriculum as their guide for curriculum alignment, and school transition planning. OSI will visit these schools and school teams throughout the school year to provide technical assistance. Additionally, participants will share their action plans, and feedback about the process with MSDE and charter schools in Maryland.
- Quality Standards For Charter Schools’ symposium took place on May 8, 2012. The focus was Standard C- Student Learning and Achievement (ELA Curriculum). Participant evaluation feedback was positive and included requests for additional symposiums to be held in the future.

GOAL 3: Strengthen the charter school authorizing processes.

- Local Education Agency (LEA) Liaisons convened monthly during SY 2011 – 2012. Participants were offered the opportunity to review and provide feedback regarding the Quality Standards For Charter Schools, changes made to the draft Charter School Model Application, and a draft of the Quality Standards for Charter Schools Self-Assessment Tool. Participants were also presented with an overview of the five year cycle of authorizing practices which incorporated the use of the self assessment

results to support charter school oversight and inform charter school evaluation for renewal. Authorizers' comments and recommendations have been used to inform the development of the documents and processes.

- LEA Liaisons had the opportunity to visit charter schools in Baltimore City and St. Mary's County during the past school year to see and learn from school-based practices being implemented by peers in other local education agencies. During SY 2012- 2013 the LEA Charter School Liaison's Meetings are planned separately based on Authorizers' levels of experience but please note that Charter School Liaisons are welcomed to attend each session regardless of experience levels.

SY 2012 – 2013 LEA Charter School Liaison's Meetings

New Charter School Liaisons-

October 12, 2012

February 8, 2013

Experienced Charter School Liaisons-

December 7, 2012

April 12, 2013

May 10, 2013